

What Works Clearinghouse



Early Childhood Education

July 30, 2007

Let's Begin with the Letter People®

Program description¹

Let's Begin with the Letter People® is an early education curriculum that uses thematic units to develop children's language and literacy skills. A major focus is phonological awareness, including rhyming, word play,

alliteration, and segmentation. Children are encouraged to learn as individuals, in small groups, and in a whole-class environment. Both cognitive and socio-emotional development are presented as keys to learning.

Research

Two studies of *Let's Begin with the Letter People®* met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards.² These two studies included 103 classrooms from various preschool settings in Texas and southeastern New York. This report focuses on immediate posttest findings to determine the effectiveness of the

intervention.³ The WWC considers the extent of evidence for *Let's Begin with the Letter People®* to be moderate to large for oral language and for print knowledge and small for phonological processing. No studies that met WWC evidence standards with or without reservations addressed early reading/writing, cognition, or math.

Effectiveness

Let's Begin with the Letter People® was found to have no discernible effects on oral language and potentially positive effects on print knowledge and phonological processing.

	Oral language	Print knowledge	Phonological processing	Early reading/writing	Cognition	Math
Rating of effectiveness	No discernible effects	Potentially positive effects	Potentially positive effects	na	na	na
Improvement index⁴	Average: +1 percentile point Range: -1 to +3 percentile points	Average: +10 percentile points Range: +5 to +12 percentile points	Average: +15 percentile points Range: +8 to +21 percentile points	na	na	na

na = not applicable

- The descriptive information for this program was obtained from publicly available sources: the program's web site (http://www.abramsandcompany.com/lets_begin_with_letter_people.aspx, downloaded April 17, 2007) and the research literature (Assel, Landry, Swank, & Gunnewig, 2006; Fischel, Bracken, Fuchs-Eisenberg, Spira, Katz, & Shaller, in press). The WWC requests developers to review the program description sections for accuracy from their perspective. Further verification of the accuracy of the descriptive information for this program is beyond the scope of this review.
- To be eligible for the WWC's review, the Early Childhood Education (ECE) intervention had to be implemented in English in center-based settings with children aged three to five or in preschool.
- The evidence presented in this report is based on available research. Findings and conclusions may change as new research becomes available. *Let's Begin with the Letter People®* is being studied under the Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research (PCER) Grants administered through the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. The final PCER reports were not released in time to be reviewed for this report.
- These numbers show the average and range of student-level improvement indices for all findings across the studies.

Additional program information¹

Developer and contact

Let's Begin with the Letter People® was developed and is distributed by Abrams and Company Publishers, Inc. Address: P.O. Box 10025, Waterbury, CT 06725. Web: http://www.abramsandcompany.com/lets_begin_with_letter_people.aspx. Telephone: (800) 227-9120.

Scope of use

According to the developer, approximately 750,000 children have used the full program since its initial publication in 1999. Several million more children have used parts of the curriculum to supplement other preschool curricula.

Teaching

Let's Begin with the Letter People® includes 26 units arranged around five thematically organized Teacher Resource books: All About Me; Animals, Animals, Animals; Everyone Has Needs; Getting Along with Others; and Nature All Around Us. Each of the Teacher Resource books offers varied teaching strategies and suggested activities. The units in each book have a Classroom Floor Plan Model, which includes suggestions for Interest Centers (individual and small-group time) and Meeting Circle (whole-class time) providing teachers with a number of choices for teaching knowledge and skills in language and literacy, as well as in science, math, art, music, social development, and motor skills. Through the Interest Centers, children are able to explore, investigate, construct, and apply knowledge. Skills

are integrated in the classroom's daily events and are taught using a number of materials such as Letter People Huggables®, children's literature, Big Books, Little Books and story tapes, songs and rhymes, Just Listen™ computer program, Ready to Read PREdecodable books, Me Bag™ (for sharing special items), Letter People Stickables™, Puppet Patterns, and Family Activity Pages.

Teachers introduce concepts during Meeting Circle time that are then explored in the Interest Centers and other group activities. For instance, the Letter People Huggables® (e.g., Mr. N) are used to introduce letters, sounds, stories, colors, shapes, and characteristics. Blueprint for Learning, the program guide for *Let's Begin with the Letter People*®, provides an overview of the program and components and includes information teachers can use for setting up their classroom and various instructional strategies.

Cost

Let's Begin with the Letter People® products can be purchased separately or in various combinations. The introductory set is available for \$1,495 and includes the Teacher Resource File (\$575), Letter People Huggables (\$495), Meeting and Greeting Cards (\$110), Song Tapes (\$165), Big and Little Books (\$338), and Read-Along Tapes (\$65). Packages that include additional components at extra cost are also available. Additional pricing information is available on the web site (www.abramsandcompany.com/lets_begin_with_letter_people.aspx).

Research Two studies reviewed by the WWC investigated the effects of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® in center-based settings. Both studies (Assel, Landry, Swank, & Gunnewig, 2006; Fischel, Bracken, Fuchs-Eisenberg, Spira, Katz, & Shaller, in press) were randomized controlled trials that met WWC evidence standards.

Assel et al. (2006) included 76 classrooms from universal pre-kindergarten, Head Start, and Title I programs in the Houston, Texas, metropolitan area. Within these three program types, Assel et al. randomly assigned school sites to one of three conditions (*Let's Begin with the Letter People*®, *Doors to Discovery*™, or a business-as-usual comparison condition).⁵ Schools in each of the two intervention conditions were further assigned to mentoring and no-mentoring conditions. The WWC is interested in the overall effectiveness of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*®. Variations in intervention effects by implementation (with or without mentoring) or program type (universal pre-kindergarten, Head Start, or Title I) are outside the scope of this review. Therefore, the WWC combined the *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® mentoring and *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® no-mentoring groups across program type. The rating of effectiveness is based on the comparison of oral language, print knowledge, and phonological processing outcomes of the combined group with the business-as-usual comparison group.⁶

Fischel et al. (in press) included 27 full-day Head Start classrooms over a three-year period in southeastern New York

and compared oral language and print knowledge outcomes for children participating in a *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® intervention group, a *Waterford Early Reading Level One*™ intervention group, or a business-as-usual comparison group.⁷ Children in all three conditions received the *High/Scope* curriculum as their base condition. The *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® intervention group used the studied intervention in conjunction with the *High/Scope* curriculum, which was the standard curriculum used by the classrooms prior to the study. The WWC includes the data from children participating in classrooms that had not participated in previous waves (that is, children from unique classrooms) because including all instances of classrooms involved a confound of past study involvement with assignment and the possible effects of this confound could not be tested because no business-as-usual comparison classrooms were studied for a second year.

Extent of evidence

The WWC categorizes the extent of evidence in each domain as small or moderate to large (see the [What Works Clearinghouse Extent of Evidence Categorization Scheme](#)). The extent of evidence takes into account the number of studies and the total sample size across the studies that met WWC evidence standards with or without reservations.⁸

The WWC considers the extent of evidence for *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® to be moderate to large for oral

5. For the rating of effectiveness in this WWC intervention report, the WWC includes only the results comparing the *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® intervention group to the business-as-usual comparison group; however, results for the comparison between the curricula are included in a separate section of this report and Appendices A6.1–A6.3. The WWC includes the *Doors to Discovery*™ versus business-as-usual comparison in a separate [WWC Doors to Discovery™ intervention report](#).
6. The WWC recognizes that this is a different use of the data than intended by the study authors. The study authors reported findings separately for each condition (*Let's Begin with the Letter People*® combined with mentoring, *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® without mentoring) and each program type (universal pre-K, Head Start, or Title I). The WWC could not confirm these findings because critical data (the number of clusters for each condition and program type) were not available. Further, combining the data across mentoring conditions and program types better addresses overall intervention effectiveness, which is the main task for the WWC. Therefore, the WWC analysis, which uses data from the study, differs from the analysis in the original study. The study authors' findings are not reported in the body of this report because the analysis is not comparable to the WWC analysis, but the subgroup analyses for program type and for the mentoring condition are reported in Appendices A4.1–A4.3 and A5.1–A5.3.
7. For the rating of effectiveness in this WWC intervention report, the WWC includes only the results comparing the *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® intervention group to the business-as-usual comparison group; however, results for the comparison between the curricula are included in a separate section of this report and in Appendices A7.1–A7.2. The WWC includes the *Waterford Early Reading Level One*™ versus business-as-usual comparison in a separate [WWC Waterford Early Reading Level One™ intervention report](#).

language and for print knowledge and small for phonological processing. No studies that met WWC evidence standards with

or without reservations addressed early reading/writing, cognition, or math.

Effectiveness Findings

The WWC review of interventions for early childhood education addresses children's outcomes in six domains: oral language, print knowledge, phonological processing, early reading/writing, cognition, and math. Assel et al. (2006) addressed outcomes in the oral language, print knowledge, and phonological processing domains and Fischel et al. (in press) addressed outcomes in the oral language and print knowledge domains. The findings below present the WWC-calculated estimates of the size and statistical significance of the effects of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® on children's performance.⁹

Oral language. Assel et al. (2006) analyzed the differences between the *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® and business-as-usual comparison groups within program type and by mentoring condition for two measures in this outcome domain [the Preschool Language Scale-IV (PLS-IV) Auditory Comprehension subscale and the Expressive Vocabulary Test (EVT)]. The differences between the intervention and business-as-usual comparison groups combined across program type and mentoring condition were not statistically significant for either outcome as calculated by the WWC, and the average effect size was neither statistically significant nor large enough to be considered substantively important according to the WWC criteria (that is, at least 0.25).

Fischel et al. (in press) analyzed the differences between the *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® and business-as-usual comparison groups for two measures in this outcome domain [the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-III (PPVT-III) and Comprehension] and found no significant effects; the WWC confirmed this. Furthermore, the average effect size was neither statistically significant nor large enough to be considered substantively important according to the WWC criteria (that is, at least 0.25).

Print knowledge. Assel et al. (2006) analyzed the differences between the *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® and business-as-usual comparison groups within program type and by mentoring condition for one measure in this outcome domain, the Woodcock-Johnson III (W-J III) Letter Word Identification subtest. The difference between the intervention and business-as-usual comparison groups combined across program type and mentoring condition was not statistically significant as calculated by the WWC; however, the effect size was large enough to be considered substantively important according to the WWC criteria (that is, at least 0.25).

Fischel et al. (in press) analyzed the differences between the *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® and business-as-usual comparison groups for six measures in this outcome domain [Get Ready to Read! Screen¹⁰; Letters Known; the Woodcock Johnson-Revised (WJ-R) Letter Word Identification subtest, the WJ-R

8. The Extent of Evidence Categorization was developed to tell readers how much evidence was used to determine the intervention rating, focusing on the number and size of studies. Additional factors associated with a related concept, external validity, such as the students' demographics and the types of settings in which studies took place, are not taken into account for the categorization.
9. The level of statistical significance was reported by the study authors or, where necessary, calculated by the WWC to correct for clustering within classrooms or schools and for multiple comparisons. For an explanation, see the [WWC Tutorial on Mismatch](#). See [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#) for the formulas the WWC used to calculate the statistical significance. In the case of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*®, corrections for clustering and multiple comparisons were needed. Assel et al. (2006) described more detailed findings (intervention effects by mentoring condition and by program type). The WWC focused on intervention effects combined across these conditions; therefore, the author's findings are not provided but are available in the original study. Fischel et al. (in press) included children from all classes in the analyses. The WWC focused on intervention effects for children in the unique classes only (i.e., those classes that had not previously participated in the study).

Effectiveness *(continued)*

Dictation subtest, Book Knowledge, and Print Conventions] and found significant differences favoring *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® on two measures, Get Ready to Read! Screen and the WJ-R Dictation subtest. The WWC could not confirm statistically significant findings for any outcomes in this domain. Furthermore, the average effect size was neither statistically significant nor large enough to be considered substantively important according to the WWC criteria (that is, at least 0.25).

Phonological processing. Assel et al. (2006) analyzed the differences between the *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® and business-as-usual comparison groups within program type and by mentoring condition for two measures in this outcome domain [the Developing Skills Checklist (DSC) Auditory subscale and the Rhyming section of the W-J III Sound Awareness subtest]. The differences between the intervention and business-as-usual comparison groups combined across program type and mentoring condition were statistically significant and favored the *Let's Begin with the*

Letter People® group for the DSC Auditory subscale as calculated by the WWC, but they were not statistically significant for the other outcome measure as calculated by the WWC. The average effect size was large enough to be considered substantively important according to the WWC criteria (that is, at least 0.25).

Rating of effectiveness

The WWC rates the effects of an intervention in a given outcome domain as: positive, potentially positive, mixed, no discernible effects, potentially negative, or negative. The rating of effectiveness takes into account four factors: the quality of the research design, the statistical significance of the findings,⁹ the size of the difference between participants in the intervention and the comparison conditions, and the consistency in findings across studies (see the [WWC Intervention Rating Scheme](#)).

The WWC found *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® to have no discernible effects on oral language and potentially positive effects on print knowledge and phonological processing

Improvement index

The WWC computes an improvement index for each individual finding. In addition, within each outcome domain, the WWC computes an average improvement index for each study and an average improvement index across studies (see [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#)). The improvement index represents the difference between the percentile rank of the average student in the intervention condition versus the percentile rank of the average student in the comparison condition. Unlike the rating of effectiveness, the improvement index is based entirely on the size of the effect, regardless of the statistical significance of the effect, the study design, or the analyses. The improvement index can take on values between -50 and +50, with positive numbers denoting results favorable to the intervention group.

The average improvement index for oral language is +1 percentile point across the two studies, with a range of -1 to +3 percentile points across findings. The average improvement index for print knowledge is +10 percentile points across the two studies, with a range of +5 to +12 percentile points across findings. The average improvement index for phonological processing is +15 percentile points for the one study, with a range of +8 to +21 percentile points across findings.

Findings for comparisons between *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® and *Doors to Discovery*™

The data for the comparison described below were included in the Assel et al. (2006) study, but they do not contribute to the overall rating of effectiveness because the WWC included the comparison of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® to the

10. The WWC placed this measure in the print knowledge domain because the majority of the items are about print knowledge and the measure correlates most highly with other measures of alphabet knowledge.

The WWC found *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® to have no discernible effects on oral language and potentially positive effects on print knowledge and phonological processing (continued)

business-as-usual comparison group in the rating for the same study, which provides the most direct evidence of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*'s effects. However, the WWC believes that the findings from this comparison provide useful information to practitioners who may be interested in comparing the effects of different curricula. The WWC reports the findings for comparisons of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® and *Doors to Discovery*™ here and in Appendices A6.1–A6.3. The WWC analyzed the differences between the *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® and *Doors to Discovery*™ groups combined across program type and mentoring condition.

Oral language. Assel et al. (2006) included data for two measures in this outcome domain. The differences between the *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® and *Doors to Discovery*™ groups were not statistically significant for either measure as calculated by the WWC, and the average effect size was neither statistically significant nor large enough to be considered substantively important according to the WWC criteria (that is, at least 0.25). The average improvement index for oral language is +8 percentile points (*Let's Begin with the Letter People*® is the intervention group and *Doors to Discovery*™ is the comparison group), with a range of +7 to +10 percentile points across findings.

Print knowledge. Assel et al. (2006) included data for one measure in this outcome domain. The difference between the *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® and *Doors to Discovery*™ groups was not statistically significant as calculated by the WWC, and the effect size was neither statistically significant nor large enough to be considered substantively important according to the WWC criteria (that is, at least 0.25). The improvement index for print knowledge is +7 percentile points (*Let's Begin with the Letter People*® is the intervention group and *Doors to Discovery*™ is the comparison group) for the one outcome in the study.

Phonological processing. Assel et al. (2006) included data for two measures in this outcome domain, and the WWC analysis indicated a statistically significant difference favoring the *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® group over the *Doors to*

Discovery™ group for the Developing Skills Checklist, Auditory subscale. The finding for the other outcome measure was not statistically significant; however, the average effect size across both outcome measures was large enough to be considered substantively important according to the WWC criteria (that is, at least 0.25). The average improvement index for phonological processing is +10 percentile points (*Let's Begin with the Letter People*® is the intervention group and *Doors to Discovery*™ is the comparison group), with a range of +3 to +17 percentile points across findings.

Findings for comparisons between *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® and *Waterford Early Reading Level One*™

The data for the comparison described below were included in the Fischel et al. (in press) study, but they do not contribute to the overall rating of effectiveness because the WWC included the comparison of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® to the business-as-usual comparison group in the rating for the same study, which provides the most direct evidence of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*'s effects. However, the WWC believes that the findings from this comparison provide useful information to practitioners who may be interested in comparing the effects of different curricula. The WWC reports the findings for comparisons of *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® and *Waterford Early Reading Level One*™ here and in Appendices A7.1–A7.2.

Oral language. Fischel et al. (in press) included data for two measures in this outcome domain. The differences between the *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® and *Waterford Early Reading Level One*™ groups were not statistically significant for either measure as calculated by the WWC, and the average effect size was neither statistically significant nor large enough to be considered substantively important according to the WWC criteria (that is, at least 0.25). The average improvement index for oral language is +1 percentile point (*Let's Begin with the Letter People*® is the intervention group and *Waterford Early Reading Level One*™ is the comparison group), with a range of –1 to +2 percentile points across findings.

The WWC found *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® to have no discernible effects on oral language and potentially positive effects on print knowledge and phonological processing (continued)

Print knowledge. Fischel et al. (in press) included data for six measures in this outcome domain. The difference between the *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® and *Waterford Early Reading Level One*™ groups was not statistically significant for any of these measures as calculated by the WWC, and the average effect size was neither statistically significant nor large enough to be considered substantively important according to the WWC criteria (that is, at least 0.25). The average improvement index for oral language is +3 percentile points (*Let's Begin with the Letter People*® is the intervention group and *Waterford Early Reading Level One*™ is the comparison group), with a range of -2 to +13 percentile points across findings.

Summary

The WWC reviewed two studies on *Let's Begin with the Letter People*®. Both studies met WWC evidence standards. Based on these two studies, the WWC found no discernible effects on oral language and potentially positive effects on print knowledge and phonological processing. Additional findings that were not considered for the rating of effectiveness indicated that *Let's Begin with the Letter People*®, *Doors to Discovery*™, or *Waterford Early Reading Level One*™ curricula affect children's outcomes similarly in the oral language and print knowledge domains, but that *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® may have a larger impact on children's phonological processing outcomes when compared to *Doors to Discovery*™. The evidence presented in this report may change as new research emerges.

References

Met WWC evidence standards

Assel, M. A., Landry, S. H., Swank, P. R., & Gunnewig, S. (2006). An evaluation of curriculum, setting, and mentoring on the performance of children enrolled in pre-kindergarten. *Reading and Writing*. Retrieved March 23, 2007, from <http://www.springerlink.com/content/gx325u2h3612817r/fulltext.pdf>

Fischel, J. E., Bracken, S. S., Fuchs-Eisenberg, A., Spira, E. G., Katz, S., & Shaller, G. (in press). Evaluation of curricular approaches to enhance preschool early literacy skills. *Journal of Literacy Research*.

For more information about specific studies and WWC calculations, please see the [WWC *Let's Begin with the Letter People*® Technical Appendices](#).